

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1           1. (Previously Presented) A stringed instrument comprising:  
2           a solid body having exposed front and rear surfaces;  
3           a tuning mechanism;  
4           a neck having one end joined to said body and an opposite end retaining said  
5 tuning mechanism;  
6           a retainer block distinct from and encompassed by said rear surface; and  
7           a plurality of strings each having a first end secured to said tuning mechanism;  
8 and a second end retained by said retainer block.

1           2. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 including a bridge  
2 mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over  
3 said bridge, and through said body to said block.

1           3. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 2 wherein said  
2 retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels  
3 extending between said inner and outer surfaces, and each of said strings passes through a  
4 different one of said channels.

1           4. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 3 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1           5. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 4 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   6. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 1 wherein said block  
2 is unitary and made of brass.

1                   7. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 6 including a bridge  
2 mounted on said front surface and wherein said strings extend from said tuning mechanism, over  
3 said bridge, and through said body to said block.

1                   8. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 7 wherein said  
2 retainer block has an inner surface and an outer surface and defines a plurality of channels  
3 extending between said inner and outer surfaces, each of said strings passes through a different  
4 one of said channels.

1                   9. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 8 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   10. (Original) A string instrument according to claim 9 wherein each of said  
2 channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   11. (Original) A string instrument according to claim 3 wherein said body  
2 defines a cavity retaining said block and intersecting said rear surface.

1                   12. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   13. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 12 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   14. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 11 wherein said  
2 block is unitary and made of brass.

1                   15. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 14 wherein said  
2 second ends are enlarged to prevent passage through said channels.

1                   16. (Original) A stringed instrument according to claim 15 wherein each of  
2 said channels comprises a counterbore in said outer surface retaining one of said enlarged second  
3 ends.

1                   17. (Previously Presented) A stringed instrument according to claim 1  
2 wherein the solid body defines a slot from the front surface through the body, and wherein the  
3 plurality of strings extend through the slot.